

City of Alexandria, Virginia

# **AD HOC GROUP ON A-FRAME & DIGITAL SIGNAGE**

June 3, 2015

7:00 PM





# Alexandria's Signage Regulations

- Signs are regulated by the Zoning Ordinance
  - First regulated in 1951
  - Most current regulations adopted in June 1992,
- Chapter 9 titled *Signs, Marquees and Awnings* regulates signage





# Sign Types that Are Allowed\*

## In Most Zones....

- Subdivision signs
- Church signs
- Contractor signs
- Curb (address) signs
- Real estate (for sale/for rent) signs
- Parking and directional signs
- Yard sale signs
- Warning signs
- Multi-family building signs
- Identification signs for specific buildings
- Political signs

\* With restrictions

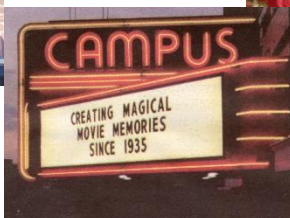




# Sign Types that Are Allowed\*

## In Commercial Zones....

- Signs allowed in most zones, and...
- Business signs
- Temporary signs
- Awning and marquee signs
- Valet parking signs



\* With restrictions

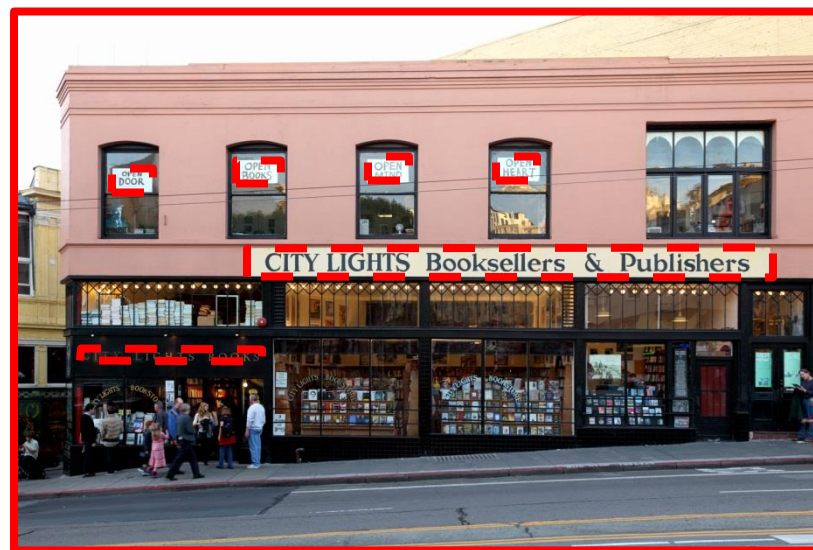




# \*With Restrictions

## Size

- Measurement is based on the size of the “rectangle” formed around the elements of the sign
- Wall signs (and wall-mounted awnings)
  - One-story buildings:
    - 1 square foot of area per linear foot of building width
  - Multi-story buildings:
    - 1 square foot of sign area per linear foot of building width for wall area up to 20 feet high, plus
    - 1 square foot of sign area per linear foot of building width for wall area above 20 feet in height
- Window signs
  - 20 percent of glazing area for each window





# \*With Restrictions

## Size

- Projecting signs (including the sides of wall-mounted awnings or marquees)
  - Maximum projection is 4 feet
  - Cannot encroach within 1 foot of a curb
  - Minimum 8 feet of clearance under the sign above a sidewalk and 14 feet under sign above an alley
- Freestanding signs
  - Only permitted on a lot with more than 100 Ft. of frontage
  - Property must provide parking
  - 25 foot setback from a side or front lot line is required
  - Size limit of 50-100 Sq. Ft. based on the number of businesses on site
  - Height limit of 25-30 Ft. based on the number of businesses on site





# \*With Restrictions

## Illumination

- No illuminated signs above 35 feet
  - A Special Use Permit CAN be issued to permit an illuminated sign above 35 feet

## Historic Districts

- Signs require Board of Architectural Review or administrative review approval
- Real estate signs, contractor signs, temporary window signs, and a single sign smaller than 1 square feet per building are all exempt from the review requirement





# Sign Types that are Prohibited

- Billboard signs
- Moving/windblown signs
- Mobile signs
- Motor vehicle signs
- Signs violating state law
- Signs which are hazardous
- Remote signs
- Home occupation signs
- Roof signs
- Signs affixed to infrastructure
- Signs not facing a street, alley, or parking lot
- Portable signs (with the exception of valet parking and the King Street A-Frame Sign Program)
- Animated signs
- Flashing signs







# **Signs Types that are Prohibited....**

## **Topic of Discussion**

- **Portable signs**
- **Animated signs**
- **Flashing signs**

# Specially Permitted Portable Signs



## King Street A-Frame Program

- Special 'wayfinding' signage program
- Does not permit store operators to put a sign in front of their business
- Guides King Street pedestrians to stores and restaurants on side streets
- Limits on locations and design



# Specially Permitted Portable Signs



## King Street A-Frame Program (Cont'd)

- Established in 2011 and codified in Section 9-202 (F) of Zoning Ordinance
- Established based on 2009 King Street Retail Study



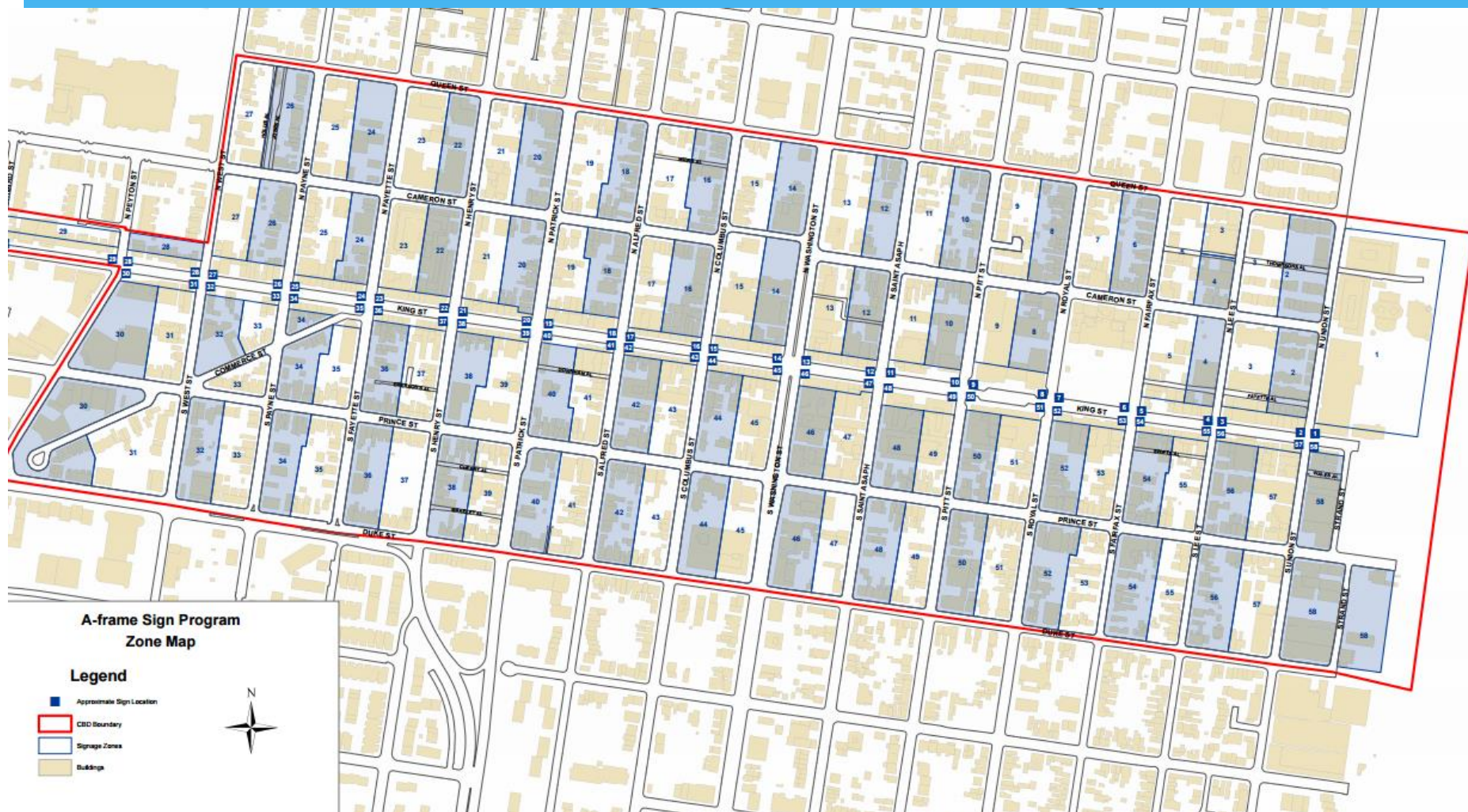


# King Street A-Frame Program

- **King Street Locations** - One on each corner (Max. 4 per intersection)
- **Eligible Businesses** - Restaurants and retail uses off of King Street but in the Central Business District, no banks, contractors or offices
- **Number of Signs** - Multiple businesses use one sign, with coordination required among those businesses
- **Administration** – City administrates program











# A-Frame Sign Issue

Although portable signs are prohibited (except for valet parking and the King Street A-Frame Sign Program), businesses on pedestrian-oriented shopping streets are using these signs to attract customers especially along King Street and Mt. Vernon Avenue





# A-Frame Sign Issue

## The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly....

- The Good:
  - Helps small businesses survive
  - Helps customers find open stores and restaurants
  - Can add 'charming' street furniture
- The Bad:
  - Can add clutter (along with tree wells, newspaper boxes, other street furniture, etc.)
  - Possible tripping hazard
  - Can give area a jumbled appearance





# A-Frame Sign Issue

The good, the bad, and the ugly....





# A-Frame Sign Issue

## Other city examples:

- Brooklyn, NY recently lifted restrictions on A-Frames on commercial streets
- Renton, WA (Seattle) permits A-Frames in front of businesses with special permit. Max size is 32"x36" and min. 4' sidewalk clearance required.
- Beaufort, SC permits A-Frames with restrictions on size and distance from building walls
- Lebanon, NH Permits A-Frames with size and placement restrictions
- Elizabeth City, NC permits A-Frames with a max size of 30"x54"

# A-Frame Sign Issue



## Other City Examples

- Charleston, SC does not permit A-Frames, but enforcement is minimal
- Annapolis, MD does not permit A-Frames, but enforcement is minimal
- Fairfax (City), VA permits A-Frames in historic district only on private property



# A-Frame Sign Issue

## For Discussion...

- Is there confusion from the city allowing side street businesses to jointly use A-Frame signs, but businesses fronting on King Street, Mt. Vernon Avenue, and other shopping streets being prohibited from using these signs?
- Can A-Frame signs for individual business co-exist with other sidewalk street furniture without creating tripping hazards and clutter?
- Can appropriate design restrictions enable A-Frame signs to be used in historic areas?
- Would allowing businesses to place A-Frame signs in front of their businesses create a chaotic effect?





# Digital Sign Issue

Digital or electronic signage is not addressed in the current Zoning Ordinance, but signage technologies are changing, and businesses and institutions are expressing interest in using these signage types.

Animated signage and signage using flashing lights are prohibited.

Situations have come up with schools and theaters where digital/electronic signs were allowed if the image stays static for a set period of time

A clear policy needs to be developed





# Digital Sign Issue

The City currently prohibits animated signs and signs with flashing lights

- Animated signs can include 'chasing' lights, scrolling messages, video monitors showing movement, and/or neon signs showing an 'activity'
- Signs with flashing lights, such as strobes or chasing lights are also prohibited





# Digital Sign Issue

## The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly....

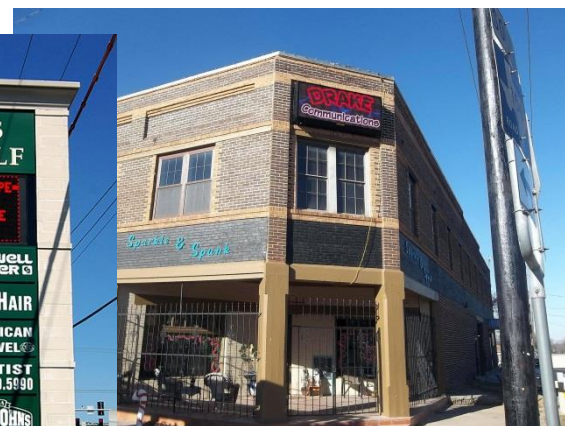
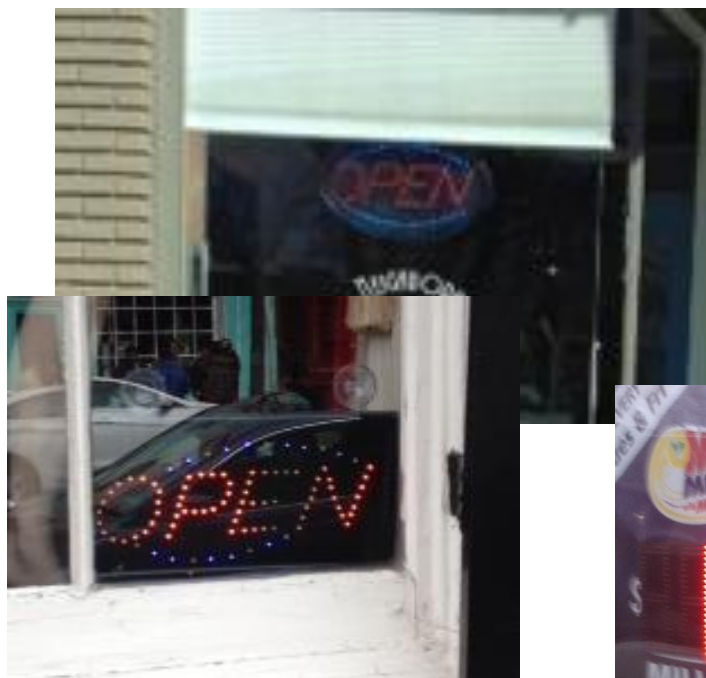
- The Good:
  - Public agencies use electronic/digital signage to convey Up-To-Date information (MetroRail, Parking Garages, Schools)
  - Increasing popularity with businesses
  - Gas stations are required by the State to post prices using digital signs, so they are permitted
  - ‘New version’ of changeable lettering on signs
- The Bad:
  - Flickering lights create glare/distraction
  - Distracting appearance
  - Possible traffic hazards
  - Brightness





# Digital Sign Issue

## The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly....





# Digital Sign Issue



## Other City Examples

- Arlington County, VA permits electronic/digital signs by special exception
- Osceola, FL permits electronic message centers with a requirement that lights remain static for minimum periods of 8 seconds.
- Spokane, WA permits electronic message centers with a requirement for evening dimmers

# Digital Sign Issue



## For Discussion...

- Are there beneficial uses for electronic/digital signs in Alexandria?
- Can current prohibitions of animated or flashing signs adequately inappropriately versions of these signs?
- Are amendments necessary to accommodate institutional uses such as schools, MetroRail, parking garages, etc?
- Are there appropriate allowances for businesses to use these signs?